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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [UZ](#)
SUBJECT: SANJAR UMAROV'S SON REPORTS FATHER IN NEAR
CATATONIC STATE IN PRISON

Classified By: POLOFF R. FITZMAURICE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

11. (C) Summary: On April 3, poloff met with Arslan Umarov, the son of Sunshine Coalition leader Sanjar Umarov, who was imprisoned in March 2006 on politically-motivated charges of tax evasion and illegal commodities trading. Arslan reported visiting his father in prison with his aunt on March 26 - 28, and noted that his father's health had declined considerably since the last time he visited him about a month ago. Arslan reported that his father was in a near catatonic state -- "like a vegetable" -- and was largely unresponsive to their presence. Believing that his father's health might not hold out much longer, Arslan asked the Embassy to intervene more aggressively with the government on his father's behalf. He also requested that the Embassy urge the government to allow outside doctors to examine his father and provide any necessary treatment. While visiting his father, Arslan also reported seeing prisoners convicted of religious extremism identified with red badges, who appeared to be in even much worse physical condition than his father. We have no doubts about Arslan's sincerity, and while it is impossible for us to verify the true status of Umarov's condition, Ambassador will raise our concern in a meeting requested for next week with First Deputy Foreign Minister Nematov. We will also raise this with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which resumed prison visits on March 11. End summary.

ARSLAN UMAROV SAYS FATHER IN NEAR CATATONIC STATE

12. (C) On April 3, poloff met with Arslan Umarov, the son of Sunshine Coalition leader Sanjar Umarov, who was imprisoned in March 2006 on politically-motivated charges of tax evasion and illegal commodities trading. Arslan reported visiting his father in prison with his aunt on March 26 - 28, and noted that his father's health had declined considerably since the last time he visited him about a month ago. Arslan reported that his father was in a near catatonic state -- "like a vegetable" -- and was largely unresponsive to their presence. Arslan reported that his father recognized him and his aunt, but had difficulty maintaining a conversation with them. Arslan said that his father resembled someone with

Alzheimer's disease and had difficulty remembering what had just been discussed.

¶3. (C) Comment: There had been reports in the past that Sanjar Umarov had been forcibly given psychotropic substances by authorities, so it is possible that he is being drugged again. Arslan reported discussing his father's conditions with neurologists in Tashkent, who reportedly told him that his father's symptoms were consistent with someone who had experienced extreme head trauma. Arslan did not see evidence that his father had been beaten on the head, but said his father had been severely beaten on the soles of his feet in the past. He reported being told by local doctors that such beating on the soles could result in head trauma. End comment.

UMAROV'S PHYSICAL CONDITION ALSO WORSENING

¶4. (C) In addition to his mental state, Arslan said that his father's physical condition had appeared to deteriorate. Umarov is now 52 years old, but Arslan said his father looked more like "eighty." His father's muscles had atrophied and he walked with difficulty and a hunched back. Arslan also reported that his father has long suffered from high blood pressure, and after almost fainting at one point during their meeting, he was given unknown injections by doctors at the prison. Sanjar Umarov reportedly told his son that he had fainted on at least two other occasions recently. Arslan said that his father received a basic level of medical care at the prison, but believed that it was not sufficient. Arslan was very worried about his father's health, and expressed concern that he could die soon.

LIMITED ACCESS TO SANJAR UMAROV

¶5. (C) Arslan said that his father was held in isolated confinement from July 2006 until August 2007, and was not allowed to see any visitors during this time period. He reported visiting his father twice in prison before July 2006, and since August 2007, he has been able to visit his father approximately every six weeks. Arslan said that the only other person who had been granted access to Umarov was his aunt (Umarov's sister), adding that Umarov's lawyer and a few human rights activists, including Nigara Khidoyatova and Vasila Inoyatova, have been denied access to him.

ASKS EMBASSY TO INTERVENE ON FATHER'S BEHALF

¶6. (C) Arslan reported that his meeting with poloff was his first attempt to visit a foreign embassy or organization since he returned to Tashkent from the United States in June 2006. Arslan reported being warned by unnamed authorities not to contact foreign embassies or organizations like the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), as this would cause him and his father "greater problems." However, Arslan said that he had become so worried about his father's health lately, that he now felt he had little to lose by reaching out to the U.S. Embassy for assistance (Note: The Umarov's family lobbying efforts with the U.S. government have been hitherto handled by his brother Gulam, who resides in Washington. End note.) He provided poloff with a letter for the Ambassador, asking the Embassy to intervene more aggressively with the government on his father's behalf. Arslan also asked the Embassy to urge the government to allow outside doctors to examine his father and provide any necessary treatment. Arslan reported that Umarov had American health insurance, and could afford to pay for the doctors and any necessary medical treatment. On April 4, poloff also received an email from Gulam Umarov, asking the Embassy to contact the ICRC to see whether it could request a meeting to see Umarov in prison (Note: We will do so. End note.)

NO ADEQUATE RESPONSE FROM THE GOVERNMENT ON UMAROV

¶7. (C) Arslan showed poloff a copy of a letter from the General Prosecutor's Office dated March 11, noting that Umarov was ineligible for the annual amnesty because he had allegedly violated internal prison regulations (Comment: Authorities routinely deny amnesty to political prisoners, claiming that they had violated such regulations. End comment.). He also provided poloff with a bound notebook, approximately 50 pages in length, consisting of numerous written appeals his family had made to government bodies, including President Karimov, the Supreme Court, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Prison Directorate (GUIN), the General Prosecutor's Office, the National Security Service, and the National Human Rights Center. Arslan reported that the government bodies rarely responded to his written appeals, and when they did respond, they invariably wrote that his father was duly convicted and imprisoned for his alleged crimes.

HOW DEEP ARE THE SUNSHINE COALITION'S POCKETS?

¶8. (C) Arslan estimated that the Sunshine Coalition had spent nearly one million dollars lobbying on his father's behalf in Uzbekistan and the West. He said that his father still had wealthy Uzbek friends, mostly businessmen who were interested in seeing Uzbekistan engage in political and economic reforms, which were helping to bankroll the effort.

FOLLOWING GOVERNMENT DEMANDS, UMAROV CONFESSES

¶9. (C) Arslan reported discussing his father's plight with unnamed Internal Affairs Ministry officials, who reportedly told him that his father's case could be reconciled if the family refrained from talking to the media or foreign embassies, and if Umarov confessed to his crimes. Arslan also provided poloff a copy of a letter from a Ministry of Internal Affairs official dated February 12, stating that Umarov would be released if he confessed to his crimes, did not violate internal prison regulations, and received a positive recommendation from prison authorities. Arslan argued that his family had largely fulfilled the government's requests, including refraining from publicizing his father's plight with the media (Note: While members of the Umarov family might not be quoted by independent media covering Uzbekistan, several prominent human rights activists, including those with connections to the Sunshine Coalition, have openly called for Umarov's release. End note.) Arslan also provided poloff with a copy of a confession that his father had written. Arslan noted that some outside observers believe that Umarov was denied amnesty because he refused to sign a written confession. Arslan said he was providing poloff a copy of the confession to demonstrate that this was not true.

SIDESTEPS QUESTION ABOUT FATHER'S GUILT

¶10. (C) When poloff asked whether Arslan believed his father was guilty of his alleged crimes, his face turned red, and said that he was unable to answer the question. "Perhaps once I am a lawyer myself, I can answer that question," he further added (Comment: Our concern with Umarov's case has long been not whether he is guilty or innocent of his alleged crimes, but the fact that he was denied due process of law and continues to be mistreated in prison. In addition, it appears that Umarov was prosecuted because of his political activities, not because of his alleged economic crimes. End comment.)

"WE'RE AN AMERICAN FAMILY"

¶11. (C) Arslan noted that he was appealing to the U.S. Embassy because his family was "Uzbek-American." Arslan himself has spent ten of his 24 years in the United States,

completing high school and earning a bachelor's degree in Tennessee, and will begin law school in Michigan next fall. Arslan said that his mother Indira and his brother Sardor are close to becoming naturalized U.S. citizens, while his brother Gulam has refugee status. His two youngest sisters were born in the United States and are citizens. Arslan said that after his mother becomes a naturalized citizen, she plans to return to Uzbekistan to monitor her husband's condition. Arslan believed that his mother's forthcoming American citizenship might offer her greater protection while she is in Uzbekistan.

EXTREMISTS FORCED TO WEAR IDENTIFYING BADGES IN PRISON

¶12. (C) Arslan was grateful that his father was at least treated better in prison than those detainees who had been convicted of religious extremism. Arslan reported seeing prisoners wearing red badges on their chest and arms, which his father explained indicated that they had been convicted of religious extremism, including membership in Hizb ut-Tahrir. In contrast, Arslan said that his father and other inmates at the prison wore black badges with their names on them. Arslan reported that the prisoners with red badges were not allowed to communicate with the other prisoners, or were horribly beaten. Arslan also said that the detainees with red badges appeared to be in much worse physical condition than the other prisoners. He said he was shocked by their appearance, as they were largely missing teeth and covered in scars, describing them as the "living dead." In his letter to the Ambassador, Arslan compared Uzbek prisons to "Fascist and Soviet labor camps."

POLOFF CRITICIZED ON WEBSITE FOR DISCUSSING UMAROV'S CASE

¶13. (C) On March 20, the state-controlled www.gorizont.uz website criticized poloff by name and accused him of spreading misinformation regarding Sanjar Umarov, who the article claims was duly convicted of "theft." The article further accused poloff of giving money and unspecified recommendations to human rights defenders in connection with the Umarov case (Comment: We believe the article could have been planted by authorities as payback for the recent hard-hitting Human Rights Report chapter on Uzbekistan, but since the article focused specifically on poloff's alleged discussions on the Umarov case, it might also highlight the government's particular sensitivity regarding Umarov. It might also be a not so subtle warning to poloff and the Embassy to cease or scale back our human rights activities. End comment.)

POLICE DEMANDING INFORMATION FROM EMBASSY VISITORS

¶14. (C) Arslan reported that when he was passing the local police guarding the Embassy, they demanded to know why he was visiting the Embassy. When he mentioned that he was meeting with poloff, they immediately demanded to see his passport, and wrote down his details. On April 3, the independent website ferghana.ru also reported that local police were writing down the passport information of approximately 30 local journalists who attended the Embassy's periodic press briefing on March 27. Some of poloff's other human rights contacts also have noted being asked by police to provide identification (Comment: Local police guarding the Embassy have asked before to see visitors' identification, but as the ferghana.ru article highlights, there has been a noticeable increase in police scrutiny of our visitors. RSO has learned that not only our Embassy but the Israeli, British, and German embassies, as well as the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP), have had the local police protecting their missions writing down names and passport numbers. End comment.)

COMMENT

¶15. (C) Arslan Umarov appeared genuinely concerned about the welfare of his father and was on the verge of crying during most of his conversation with poloff. We have no doubts about his sincerity, though it is impossible for us to verify whether Sanjar Umarov is truly on death's door, as Arslan fears. We will continue to raise Umarov's case, and those of other political prisoners, in our discussion with government officials, including with First Deputy Foreign Minister Nematov next week. Given the information regarding Umarov's declining health, we will also request that the government grant independent doctors access to Umarov and provide him with any necessary treatment. We also will raise Umarov's case in our private discussions with the ICRC, and urge them to request access to political prisoners, including Umarov, over the next six months. While the government may not fulfill such requests, they will nevertheless emphasize to the government our continuing concern for Umarov's condition, which hope fully will result in better treatment for Umarov.

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